

THE AMERICAN ARCHITECT

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THE CITY HALL, NEW YORK, WITH MUNICIPAL BUILDING AT RIGHT

CAN DESIGN BE REDUCED TO RULE?

PART I

By JOHN BEVERLEY ROBINSON, *Professor of Architecture, Washington University*

BY design I mean primarily the design of the exterior of buildings. Every architect knows that with a given proper plan to start from the exterior can be made pleasing or unpleasing according to the skill of the designer.

Clients know it too, when they say, "I know what kind of a house I want myself, but I need an architect for the outside of it." In larger matters again, where the

plan is arranged by those who determine the inter-relation of departments of large businesses—banks, insurance companies, and the like—their special occupation, they look to the architect to provide a pleasing exterior.

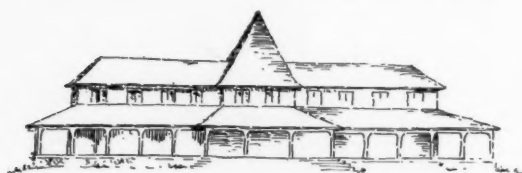
Although true enough in a way, it is vain to say that the exterior design is of no importance, that the design of the exterior springs from the plan, that a certain plan

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implies a certain exterior, because obviously a plan may be developed in half a dozen ways externally. Moreover, a very small modification in the plan, such as will in no way affect its working capacity, often involves a radical change in the treatment of the exterior.

Well I remember in my early draughtsman days when "the boss" gave me a sketch plan and exterior of a small country inn to "work up."

He had indicated something of this sort,



a square, pyramid-roofed block, with a long, hip-roofed wing on each side. In the innocence of my heart (I had not "caught on" then) I worked it up in this way, with



a neat low gable in the middle; and was profoundly astonished when he began to tear his hair, and growl objurgations.

Certain rules can be found, I am confident, which will guard the designer, especially the incipient designer, against such palpable blunders, even though there be none which can give the delicate touch and nameless inspiration of the born artist.

The great danger in devising such rules, is that of lapsing into dogmatism, or taking up with theatrical fads and fancies, and twisting the facts to suit the theories; as Ruskin in his early career laid down the dictum that imitation of natural forms was the basis of all design, and left himself no recourse but denunciation of everything that failed to conform to this test.

The method is that which has proved itself successful in other branches of science, comparison of examples, classification of the facts, and such generalization as naturally results.

Classification of facts alone, as in crystallography, goes a long way toward making

a science; and, when such a basis for the classification as the axial system can be devised or discovered, the science may be well advanced, though nothing be known yet of the reasons why the molecules arrange themselves in one way or another.

Thus it seems safe to begin with the statement that all isolated buildings present different appearance from different points of view, as well as in the general silhouette of the whole, as in the elevation of each face.

A second statement that seems free from any imputation of undue dogmatism, is that many modern buildings are composed of several parts; while most of the ancient buildings consist of but a single part, if the Hibernicism may be forgiven.

I mean that while a Greek temple or a Roman amphitheatre is fundamentally but a single object, however it may be detailed with minor objects, colonnades or arcades, pediments or cornices, such a building as the New York City Hall is clearly made up of several parts, each of which might almost stand alone as a separate building. Thus there is a block in the middle, with a belfry on top of it and a portico in front of it. On each side there is another block of smaller size and greater projection in plan and these are joined to the middle block by two more parts, setting back a trifle in plan from the face of the main central block.

If we search through our memories, and our photographs, we shall find a great number of buildings of a precisely similar arrangement, museums, State houses, post-offices:—some crowned with a dome instead of a belfry, some with neither one nor the other, but all with the central part, the minor flanking parts, and the two connecting parts.

Are we not within the limits of reason then, in putting down as a general statement that such an arrangement has repeatedly been used with success, and may always be used where the plan permits?

In the same way we happen to notice that the fronts of many churches, both mediæval and modern, are composed of two towers, with or without spires, joined together by a less conspicuous part between, much as the flanking parts are joined to the central part in the formerly discussed arrangement.

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Especially when spireless, the massive square bulks of these towers recall to our minds the great twin pylons of Egypt, with their connecting portal, and the ancient dictum that unity is the essential quality of all art recurs to us.

How can the duality of these twin towers, or twin pylons possess any unity of aspect? Yet that it does possess such unity, that the two do hang together and fill the eye as a single building, is indisputable. With a little further consideration it seems possible that the virtue of imparting this sense of unity may lie in the connecting part. Imagine this removed, and we no longer have one building in effect, but two buildings standing side by side.

Thus in Fig. 1 is shown an apartment house where the two blocks are connected



FIGURE 1

by an entrance doorway, and in Fig. 2 another in which there is no connection. It will hardly be disputed that the appearance is more pleasing where there is a connecting part than where there is none.

Instead of talking about a central block and flanking blocks and connecting parts and so on, may we not invent a simple nomenclature?

In pedagogy or criminology a man is revered in proportion to the complication

and obscurity of the nomenclature that he has invented, but architects are not to be fooled by any such device; we must use the simplest and clearest nomenclature possible, for brevity and clarity, rather than for obscurity and pretentious polysyllabic ponderosity.

Let us call the parts that we have observed masses, and the connecting parts links,



FIGURE 2

and we shall find that we have arrived at the statement that all buildings are composed of either a single mass; of two masses or of three masses; and that where the masses are two or three in number they are connected by links.

Persistent search will reveal that the principal façade of all existing buildings in which the æsthetic element predominates does conform to one or the other of these types. Façades composed of four masses are rarely found; never, except in hospitals, factories, or other buildings where the plan requires four wards or four departments and the utilitarian needs predominate over the æsthetic.

And here Mysticism steps up with a winning smile. "I could have told you so in advance," she says. "You have hit upon the sacred number three, the basis of all theologies, the magic trigon, the triple chord—"

Pardon me, my dear Mysticism, I interrupt. You are a charming creature. Everybody likes you. I have a leaning for you myself. But your methods lead nowhere. There are so many threes that

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mean nothing. A hen sets three weeks, as Mark Twain observed. Possibly there are interesting relations connected with the number, the crystallographic axes, for ex-

ample, that we started with; but these must come much later in the game, perhaps not at all. For the present we have to do with facts only.

THE CURRENT ARCHITECTURAL PRESS

THE *Architectural Record* for October is a country house number, and will, no doubt be of considerable interest, particularly to the lay reader. To the professional man, most of the subjects illustrated will be familiar by reason of their having been many times illustrated in other architectural publications.

In spite of this, the number is of value as it groups a great many good examples of recent domestic architecture between the covers of a single issue and shows the very high plane that has been reached in the designing and planning of country houses in the United States.

The tendency of many architects to follow the example of painters in producing work presenting again and again the same characteristics of design leads to the same criticism of the architect that has been many times made of the painter, viz.: that he exhibits an apparent paucity of ideas. There is a wide difference between individuality as shown in work, and the adoption

(FROM THE BRICKBUILDER)



HOUSE AT ROLAND PARK, PA.
MR. HOWARD SILL, ARCHITECT

of certain features or mannerisms which like a trademark are stamped upon the entire product of an office. While such a course does not in any sense carry with it a reflection as to artistic merit of the feat-

ures involved, it does lead to the inference that the inventive artistic faculty of the designer has probably reached its highest point.

The illustrations so thoroughly dominate

(FROM THE BRICKBUILDER)



HOUSE AT ROLAND PARK, PA.
MR. HOWARD SILL, ARCHITECT

this issue of *The Architectural Record* that aside from a few words describing them there is little text of moment.

The leading article in *The Brickbuilder*, for September, is by Mr. Thomas Harlan Ellett, and is the first of a series on "Modern Domestic Stairways."

The first installment treats of "The Aristocratic Stair" and is illustrated by examples of the work of Messrs. McKim, Mead & White, Mr. Horace Trumbauer and Mr. James Gamble Rogers.

The illustration pages of the issue are chiefly given over to the work of Mr. Howard Sill, whose strict adherence to the traditions of the Georgian Period has resulted in a type of building that while doubtless correct in presentation seems to lack perhaps the personal touch of originality that sometimes adds much charm to this interesting style. A house at Scaleby, Virginia, very fully illustrated is an excellent example of the Georgian.

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A Memorial Hospital at Pawtucket, R. I., by Mr. Guy Lowell is a pleasing departure from the style of building so often adopted for hospitals.

Part IV of Mr. C. Howard Walker's series on "Distinguished Architecture as a Precedent," appears in this issue. A description with illustration of terra cotta ornament employed in a store building at Boston, Mass., has apparently strayed in the "make up."

"Recent Designs in Domestic Architecture" as illustrated and described in *The International Studio* for October, are principally of the work of Mr. R. F. Johnson and Mr. Norman Evill. A full page color plate of a detail of a half timbered house

(FROM THE ARCHITECTURAL RECORD)



TERRACE AND LOGGIA OF A HOUSE AT
BRYN MAWR, PA.

MR. CHARLES A. PLATT, ARCHITECT

by Mr. Evill is an interesting treatment of this type of country house.

As in previous numbers the illustrations are confined to reproductions of architects' sketches, and while interesting from the artistic viewpoint, offer little that is of value to the man in practice.

The text and illustrations of this issue of *The Studio* are of usual excellence, and give the reader a comprehensive idea of current art in this country and in Europe.

Architecture for October presents in its illustration few subjects that are not already familiar by reason of previous illustration in architectural magazines. A house at Mt. Kisco, shown in this issue, received October 15th, had already appeared in *THE AMERICAN ARCHITECT* of October 9th.

The First Baptist Church at Pittsburgh, by Messrs. Cram, Goodhue & Ferguson, very thoroughly illustrated in *The Architectural Record* last month, is also presented in this number of *Architecture*. Other examples are the Entrance Gates at Princeton

(FROM THE BRICKBUILDER)



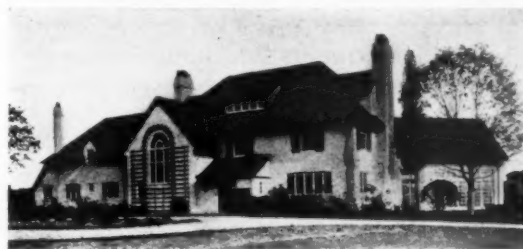
A HOUSE AT MANCHESTER, MASS.

MR. CHARLES A. PLATT, ARCHITECT

University, completed some time ago and illustrated in *THE AMERICAN ARCHITECT* of February 7, 1912, describing the exhibition of the Architectural League of New York. Another example of belated illustration is the House of Mrs. Aymar Embury II at Englewood, N. J. This attractive little cottage was illustrated in *THE AMERICAN ARCHITECT* of October 19th, 1907. While the examples referred to are of undoubted architectural interest, it is difficult to understand why all should be again illustrated at this late date. Perhaps it is on the principle that "a good story is worth telling twice."

The text presents along with other usual material another installment of the serial

(FROM THE ARCHITECTURAL RECORD)



A HOUSE AT HEWLETT, L. I.

MESSRS. ALBRO & LINDBERG, ARCHITECTS

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article by Mr. Leavitt on "Landscape Design."

One of the principal subjects illustrated in *The Western Architect* for October is a Normal School at San Diego, Cal., Mr. W. S. Hebbard, Architect. This is an interesting and coherently designed structure, but it does not seem to sufficiently suggest an educational institution in its aspect to meet general approval. Other illustrations are a loft building at Los Angeles, Messrs. Parkinson & Bergstrom, Architects, a hotel in the same city by Messrs. Eager & Eager, an Asylum for the Blind at Oakland, Cal., Sellon & Hemmings, Architects. Perhaps as interesting as any subjects shown are the residences, all more or less typical of those to be found in the territories represented. These include one in Los Angeles by Eager & Eager, one in Pasadena by George Lawrence Stimson, one in Ravina, Ill., by Lawrence Buck and Beers & Beers, Associates, and one in Oshkosh, Wis., by William Waters.

In the August issue of *The Architectural Review* of Boston, many criticisms are made of the text and illustrations published in *THE AMERICAN ARCHITECT* during July. As long as these are confined to statements of facts we are, of course, quite willing to

(FROM THE ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW)



CHARLESTOWN, MASS., HIGH SCHOOL
MESSRS. STICKNEY & AUSTIN, ARCHITECTS

concede to the reviewer the right to his opinions, but when either through ignorance or carelessness certain misstatements are made, we feel obliged to protest. For example: The reviewer assigns the authorship of the series of articles on "Stained Glass" appearing in *THE AMERICAN AR-*

CHITECT to Mr. Eaton, while Mr. Clement B. Heaton is the author. A minor error, perhaps, but one that would make a student searching through a public library much trouble in locating these valuable contributions.

Again, it is stated that "The United States Rubber Company's Building, illustrated

(FROM THE WESTERN ARCHITECT)



SAN DIEGO, CAL., NORMAL SCHOOL
MR. W. S. HEBBARD, ARCHITECT

in these (*The Architectural Review*) columns in March, 1912, is illustrated (by *THE AMERICAN ARCHITECT*) in process of erection in the issue of July 10th." As a matter of fact, the only illustration of this building published in *The Architectural Review* in March, was a small cut of the architect's perspective, which was copied from and credited to *THE AMERICAN ARCHITECT* of March, 1912. The July presentation in *THE AMERICAN ARCHITECT* was on the completion of the building, was the authorized illustration by the architects and our entire issue was devoted to it.

We have commented on these statements at length, simply to correct any erroneous impressions that might be formed as a result of the misinformation and half-truths published by our contemporary.

A tabulation of the illustrations and text in this issue of *The Architectural Review* will be found in the general index in another column of this issue.

The illustrations in *The Architectural Review* for September appear to have been very carefully selected, and not the least interesting are the sketches that accompany the serial article entitled, "The Log of the Dorian." These sketches show a regard for essentials in delineation and the elimi-

(Continued on page 176)

THE AMERICAN ARCHITECT

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ÆSTHETICS AND ENGINEERING

TO those concerned with æsthetic advancement both in this country and abroad, probably the most encouraging sign of the times is contained in the evidences of interest in and appreciation of the elements involved, recently shown by engineers. In fact, so great and general has become this interest that with reasonable confidence it can now be asserted that the time when engineering structures, such as bridges, standpipes, viaducts, etc., were constructed without regard to appearance is happily passing. Today engineers as a class acknowledge the large importance of æsthetics in connection with their work, to such an extent that where those features of design which affect appearance are neglected in present day engineering structures, it is probably safe to say that the fault does not lie with the engineer.

It is significant of the new order of things that the President of the Engineering Section of the British Association, devoted a considerable portion of his recent address before that body to the question of the artistic element in engineering work. When engineers in general practice recognize their limitations and associate themselves with architects in the construction of purely engineering works, and architects, on the other hand, avail of the expert knowledge of the engineer in the solving of problems involving the strength and strictly utili-

tarian features of buildings designed by them, a long step in the direction of both the artistic and the efficient development of the country will have been made.

Engineers concerned only with stress diagrams and proportioning of members and connections to safely meet the stresses developed, are in the same class with architects who give their entire attention to the design of an artistic façade, leaving the proper proportioning of structural members to bridge shops, for example, and matters of foundations, heating, sanitation, lighting, etc., to various contractors engaged and interested in the cost and execution, rather than the proper design of the work. The passing of both may be contemplated with satisfaction by their confrères and the general public alike.

A NEEDED CIVIC IMPROVEMENT

THE suggestion prompted by a recent accident to a pedestrian on Central Park West, to the effect that the wall bounding Central Park be moved some fifteen or twenty feet further East in order to provide space for vehicular traffic on both sides of street car tracks, whereas it is now confined entirely to one side of the street, will hardly meet with general approval.

Encroachments on park areas in New York have been attempted without success so many times within recent years that the temper of citizens regarding this matter should be well known. It would seem that the only remedy worthy of endorsement or even serious consideration lies in the removal entirely of street car tracks from this Avenue. With many lines of traffic parallel to Central Park West, there is no imperative necessity for a car line on this street. Its removal would not in all probability be very strongly objected to by property owners or anyone else, with the possible exception of the company operating the street car lines. In fact, it would seem that to clear all the streets bounding Central Park, of street car traffic which now borders it completely on two sides and partially on a third, would constitute a positive civic improvement and restore to Central Park something of that dignity which rightfully belongs to it and of which it has been for many years deprived.

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RECENT LEGAL DECISIONS

LIABILITY FOR DEATH OF LABORER BY COLLAPSE OF BUILDING

The lessee of a building had plans and specifications for the alteration of the building prepared by architects. These were approved by the city building bureau and a permit granted to a construction company to do the work. While the alterations were being made the building collapsed, killing a laborer, employed by a sub-contractor, whose representative sued the lessee for damages. The contract stipulated that the contractor would "provide all materials and perform all work" required by the plans and specifications under the direction of the architect acting as counsel for the lessee; that the architect's decision as to the true intent and meaning of the plans and specifications should be final; and that the contractor should bear all loss or damage from accident which might occur to neighboring party or persons during the progress of the work, whether from accidents or carelessness on his part, or on the part of his representatives, until possession was taken by the owner. Under this contract it was held that the con-

tractor was an independent contractor. Its legal effect was to transfer to him possession of the building, reserving to the lessee the privilege, through its architects, of inspecting the work and enforcing compliance with plans and specifications. Not having interfered with the work either itself or by its architects it was not liable for the death of the deceased.

United Gas Improvement Co. v. Larsen, 182 Fed. 620.

ARCHITECT'S POWER TO ALTER CONTRACT

The fact that an architect is employed by an owner to draw the plans and specifications and to superintend the construction of a building and see that it is carried out in compliance with such plans and specifications confers upon the architect no implied power to change the contract. Nor is the owner estopped from disputing any assumed authority by the architect to alter the contract, although he knew that the contractor was engaged upon the work covered by the modification, if he was justified in presuming that the work was being done under the original contract.

Brown v. Coffee (Cal.), 121 Pac. 309.

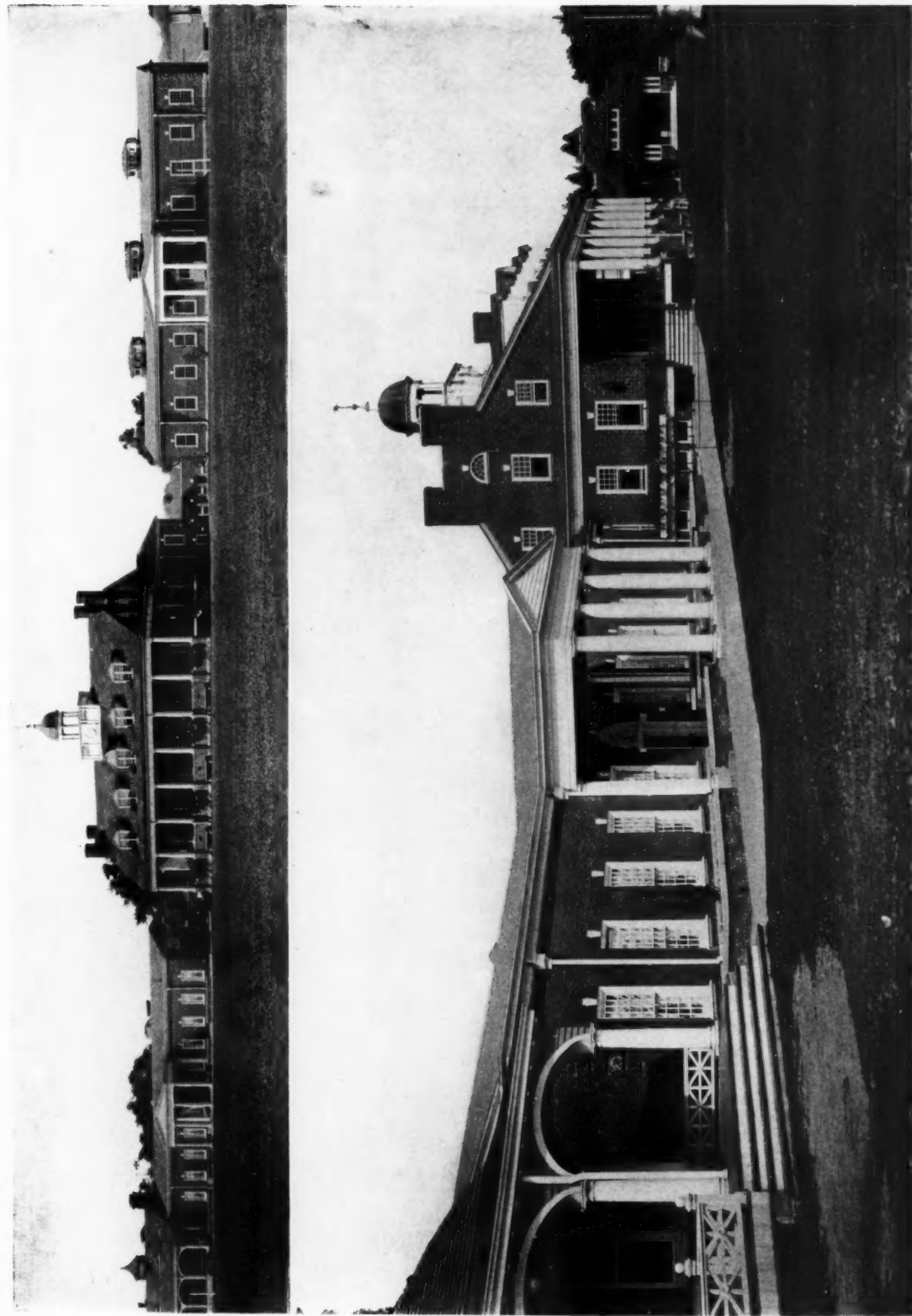
THE CURRENT ARCHITECTURAL PRESS

(Continued from page 174)

nation of non-essential, a faculty unfortunately not always possessed by artists who attempt to sketch from nature.

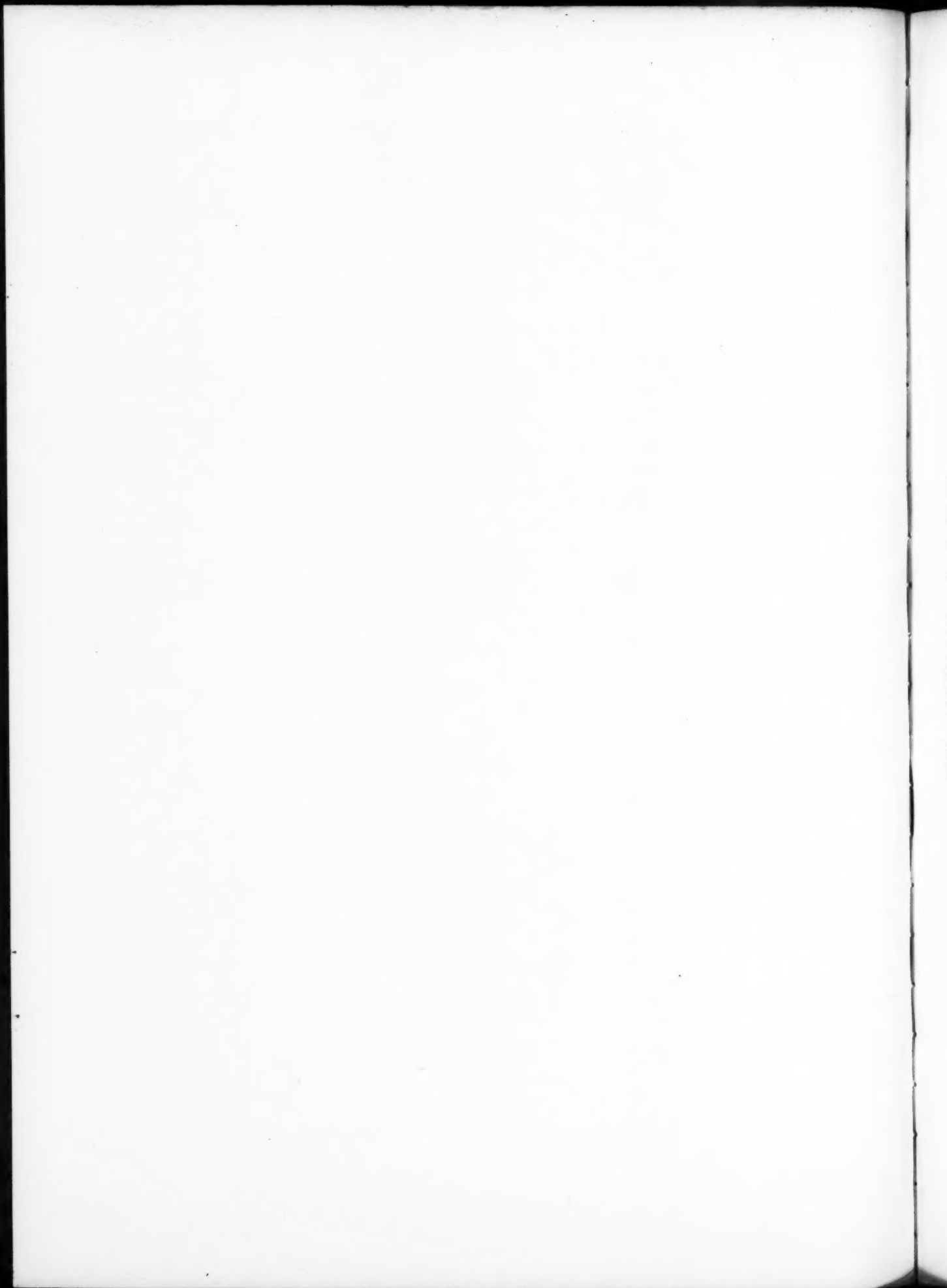
Of the architectural subjects reproduced, probably the most important is the Leader Building at Cleveland, Ohio, Mr. Charles A. Platt, Architect. This subject has been very fully and comprehensively illustrated. Other subjects are a country house, Messrs. Pond & Pond, Architects, the Charlestown, Mass., High School, by Messrs. Stickney & Austin, a dignified addition to the school buildings in and near Boston. The illustration of interesting English subjects is continued in this issue, the present examples being churches by the late G. F. Bodley and Mr. Beresford Pite.

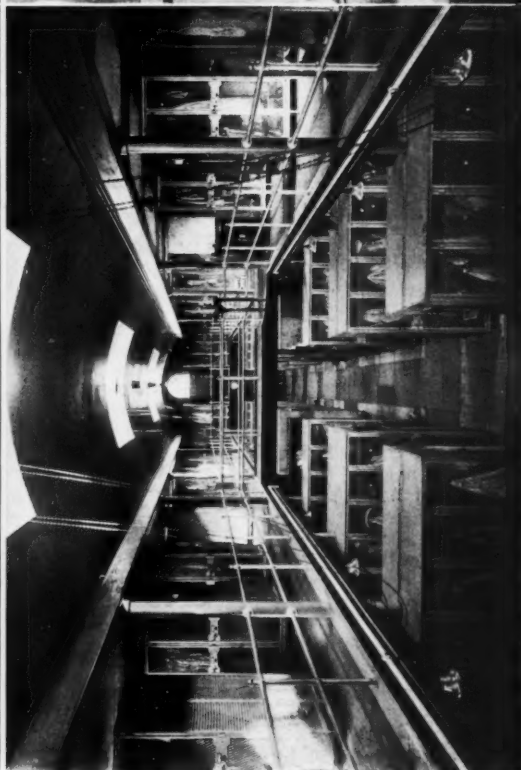
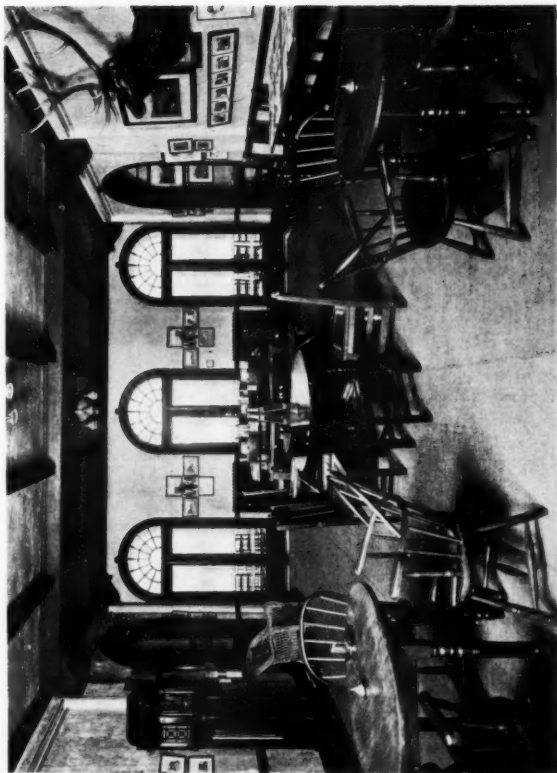
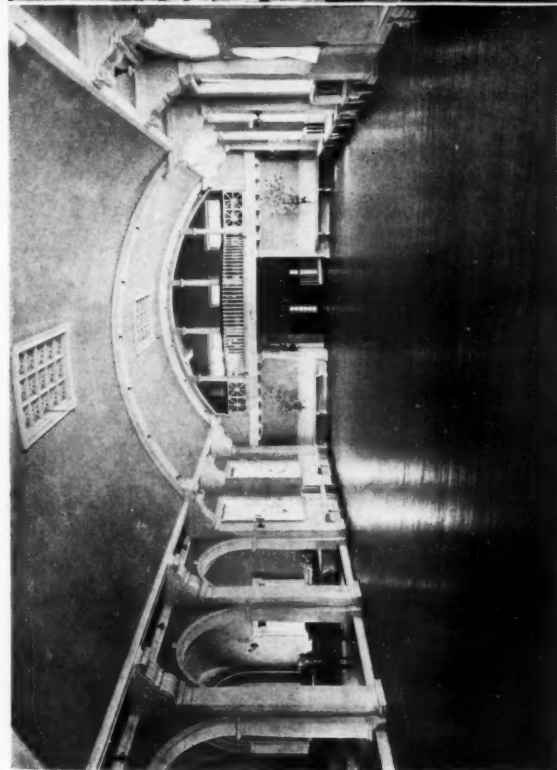
We regret that in the review of the Current Architectural Press, the usual carelessness or lack of authoritative expression is evident. For example, while this reviewer takes occasion to refer to the articles that have been printed in THE AMERICAN ARCHITECT concerning the Repeal of the Tarnsley Act, it is somewhat disconcerting to find a writer who seriously states that in a succeeding issue "we (*The Architectural Review*) shall authoritatively deal with the essentials of the 'Tarnsley Act.'" Throughout the paragraph this reviewer refers to the "Tarnsley Act," and we are led to wonder if his method of treatment will be more accurate than his knowledge of the name of the originator of the Act and the designation by which it has always been known.



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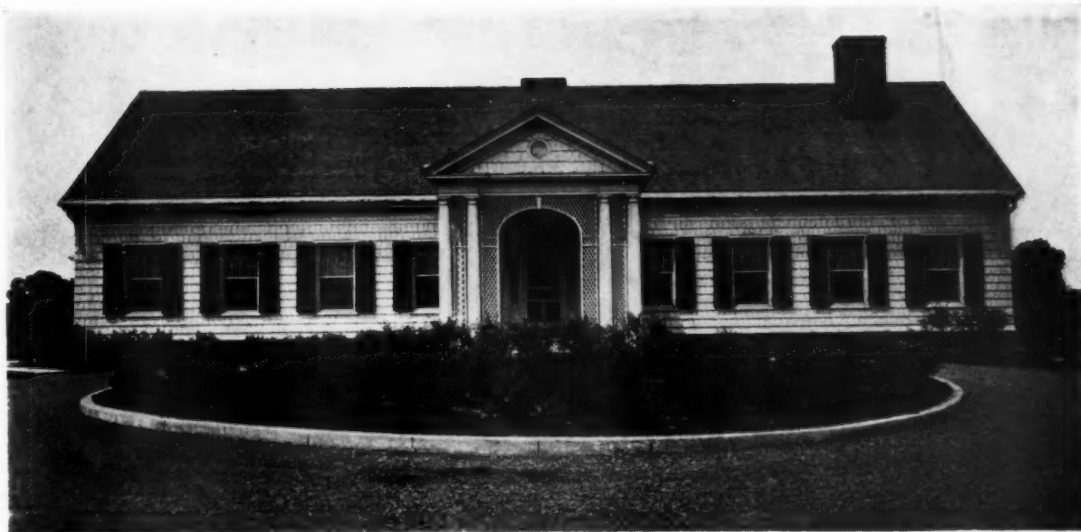


INTERIOR VIEWS IN NEW BUILDING FOR

THE PHILADELPHIA CRICKET CLUB, ST. MARTIN'S, PA.

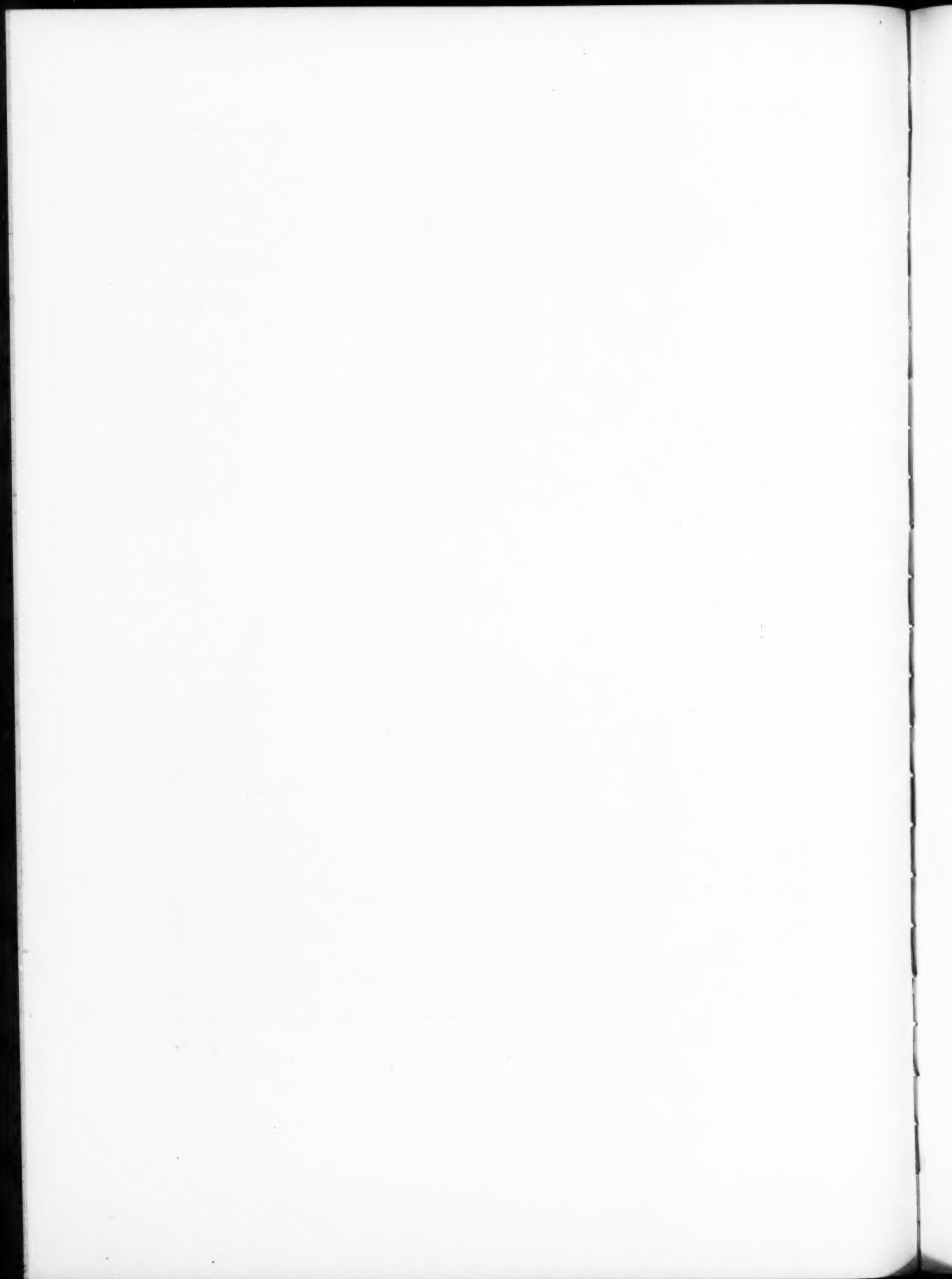
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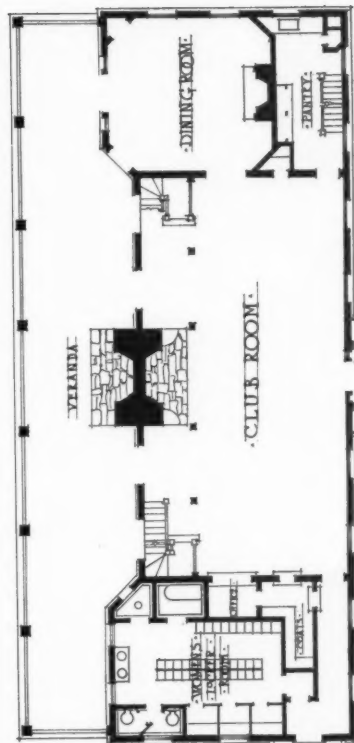
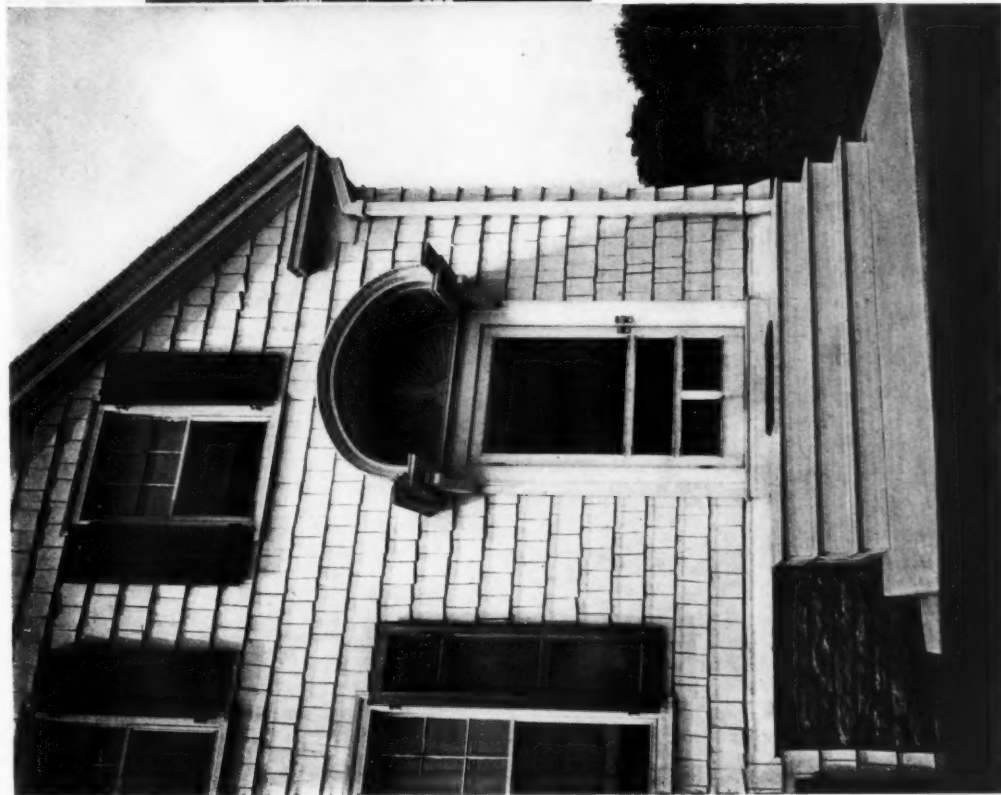




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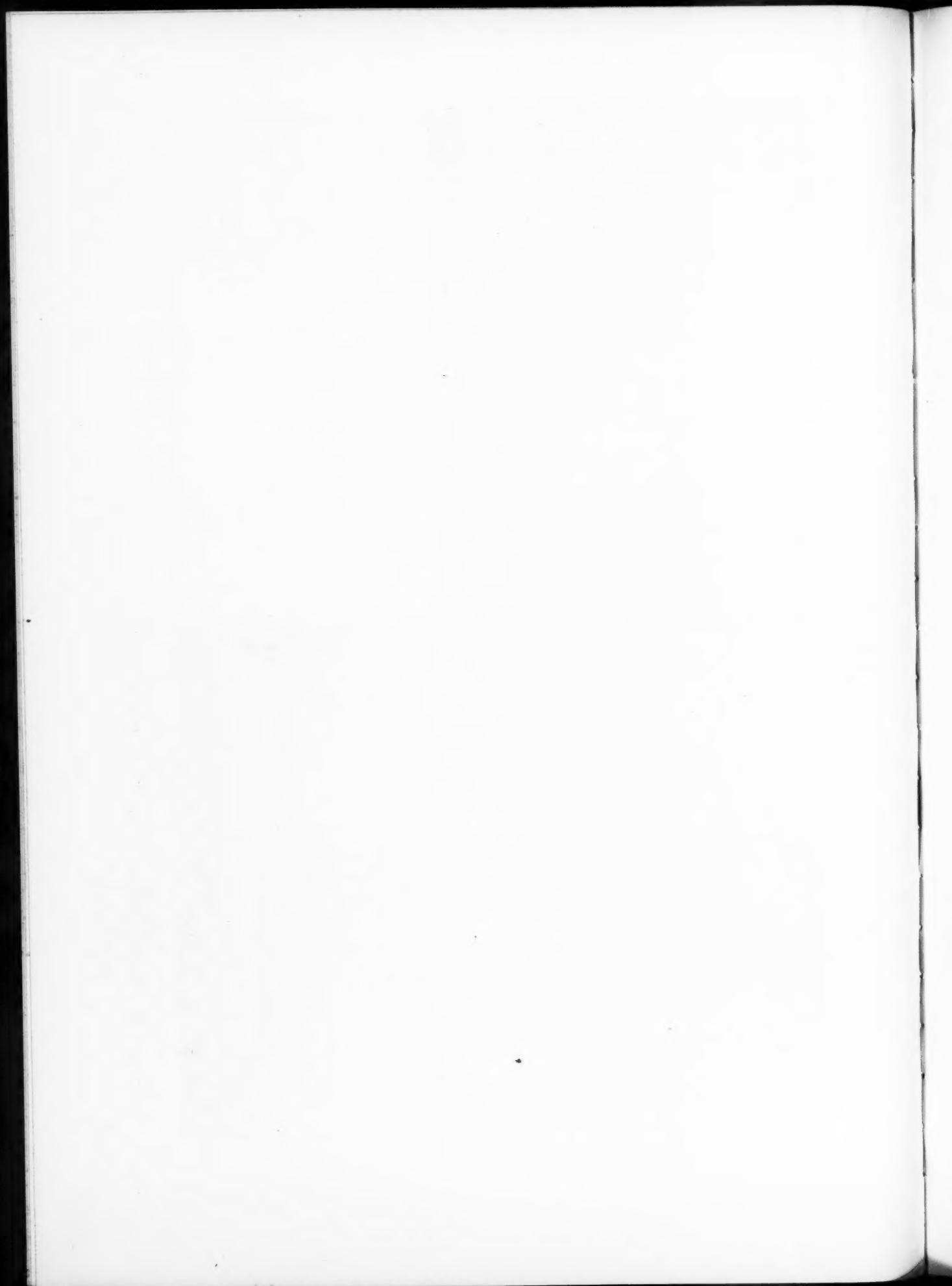
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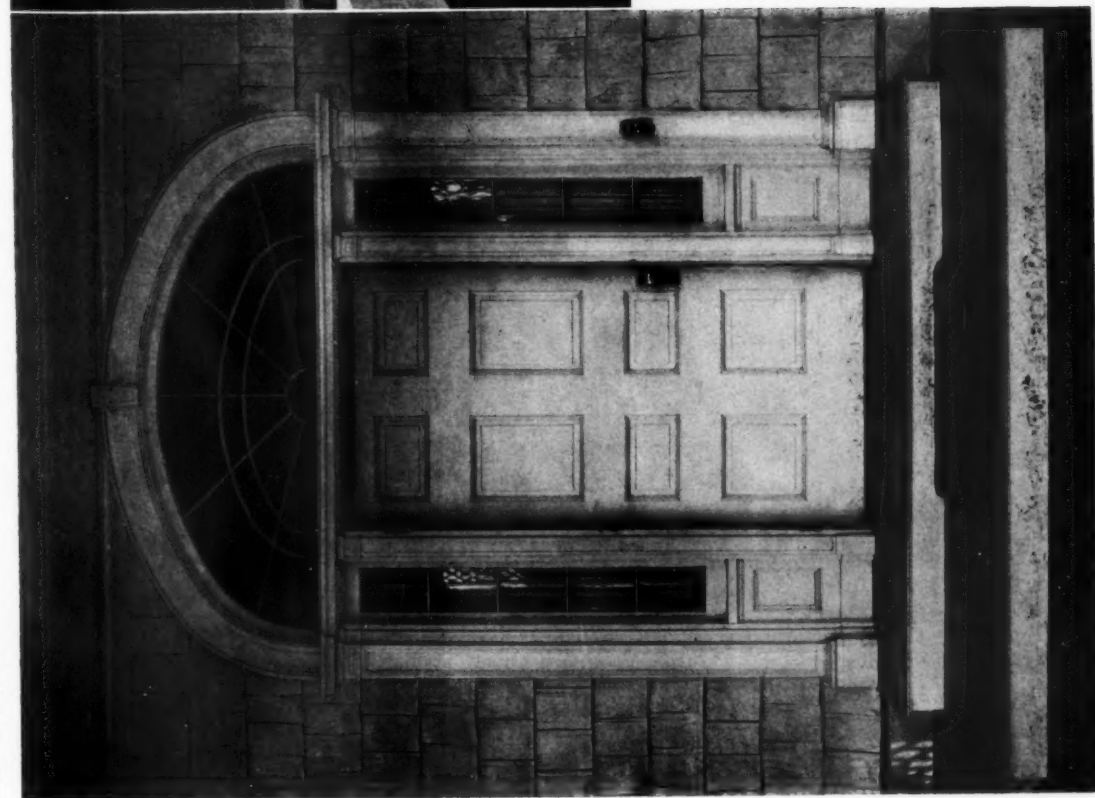




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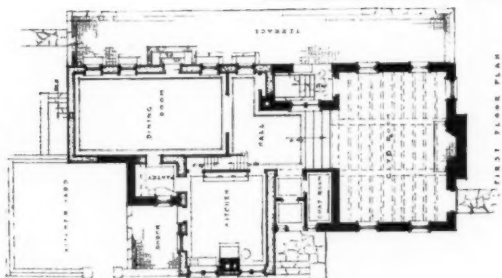
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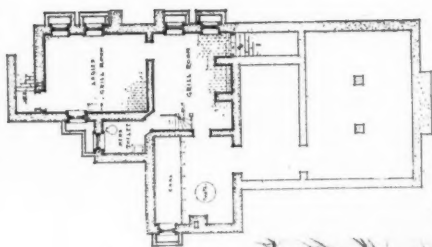


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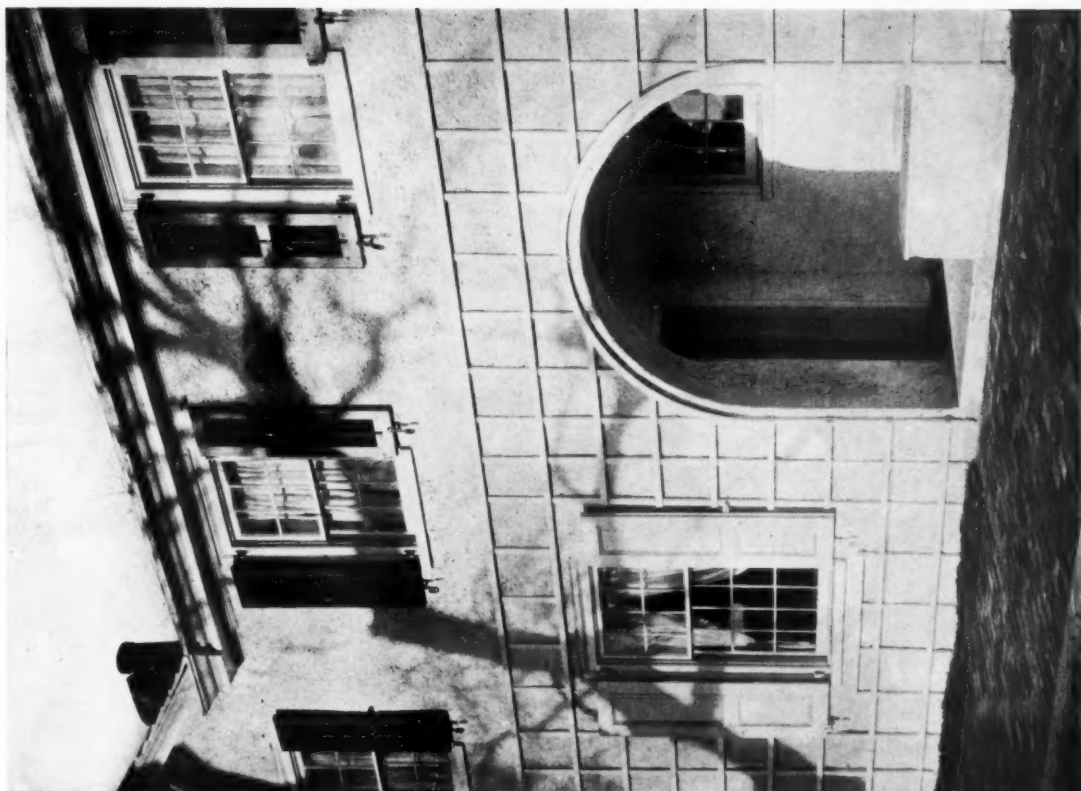
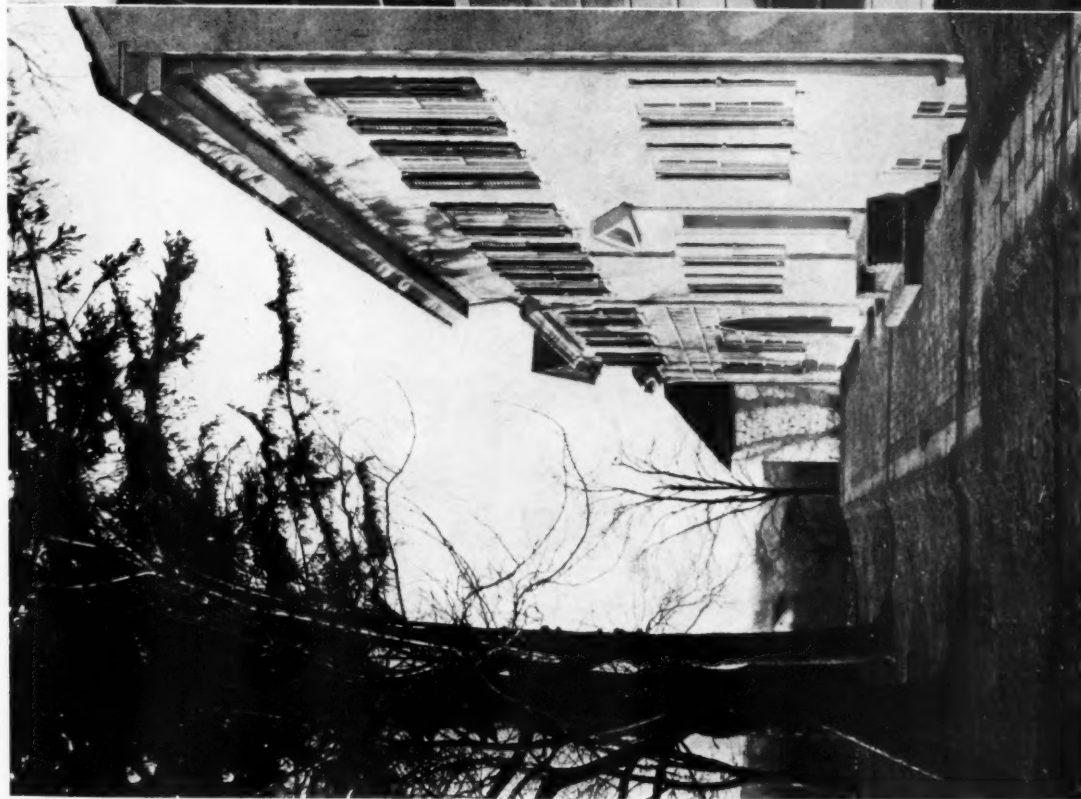


CLUB HOUSE FOR THE PICKERING HUNT
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CLUB HOUSE FOR THE PICKERING HUNT, PHOENIXVILLE, PA.
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THE AMERICAN ARCHITECT



TOMB OF DOGE ANDREA VENDRAMIN

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